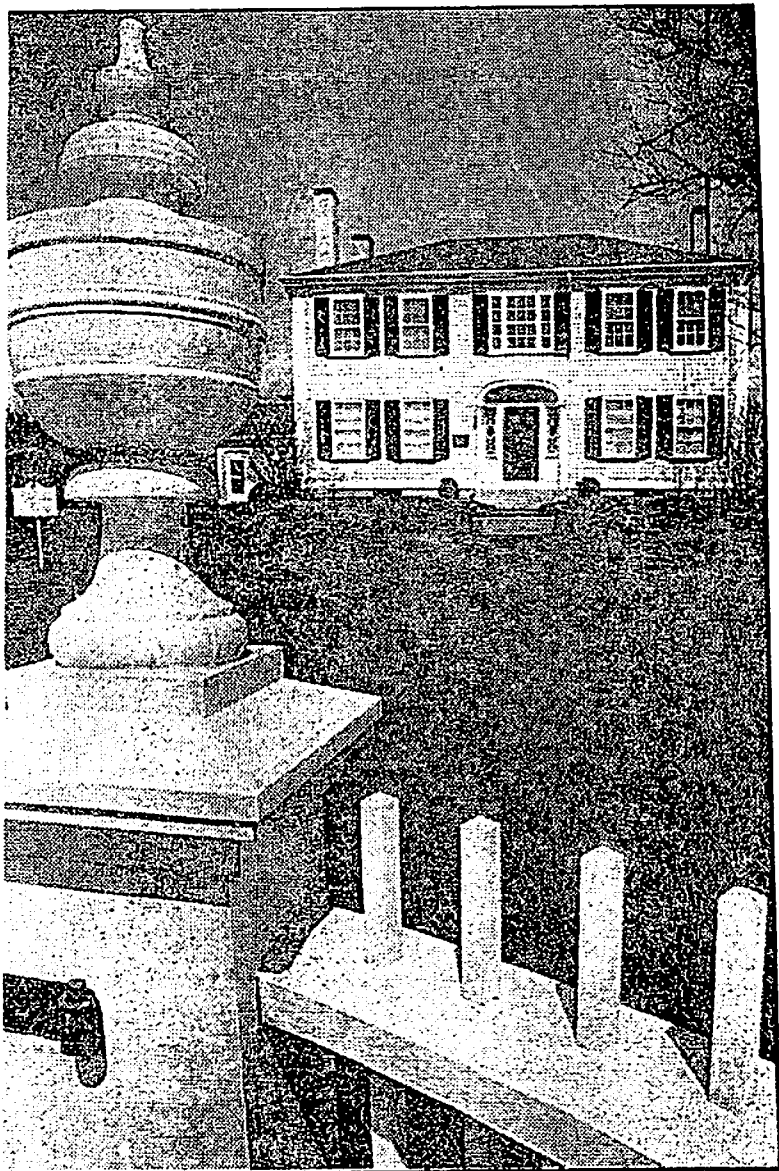


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Greg Derr/The Patriot Ledger

King Caesar House, now a museum, was built by Ezra Weston in 1809.

## King Caesar House rich with history

Resting comfortably and majestically above Duxbury Bay is the King Caesar House.

The mansion on King Caesar Road, built as the home of one of the country's largest shipping magnates in the early 1800s, is now a museum and a testament to the architecture of a period when Duxbury was a great maritime center.

"For Duxbury, the King Caesar House is more than an elegant family home which has become a museum," said Town Historian Katherine Pillsbury.

"It represents the energy and ambition of the town's golden age of shipping, when local vessels captained by local men ventured out from this port to markets around the world."

The house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was bought by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society in 1965 after a successful townwide effort to raise \$148,000.

"In dedicating this house you are adding to the glories of the second oldest town in Massachusetts," said former Sen. Leverett Saltonstall at dedication ceremonies on June 25, 1967.

The King Caesar House has been open to the public in the summer ever since.

Ezra Weston, who was born in 1743, became known as King Caesar because of the shipping empire he built in Duxbury. Weston, who began building fishing and cargo vessels in 1764, was considered the richest man in Plymouth County. He owned nearly half of Duxbury.

When Weston died in 1822, his son

Ezra Weston II, inherited the title of King Caesar.

The Westons' 10-acre shipyard was located along the south bank of the Blue Fish River. But they did more than just build ships. They also grew the timber used for the ships' hulls, and their mill produced cloth for sails.

The Lloyds of London insurance company recognized the business as the largest shipbuilding operation in the United States.

The younger Weston, who also served as a selectman and the president of the Duxbury Bank, built the mansion in 1809 for his wife, Jerusha Bradford. The house was enlarged and renovated in 1840. The Weston family lived there until 1886.

The carpenters who built the Westons' fleet of ships used the same expertise and craftsmanship to build the mansion.

Ezra and Jerusha Weston spared no expense in furnishing their home with the most luxurious items, including oriental rugs, porcelain, silver and wallpaper imported from France.

"The house stands today as a reflection of the self-confidence and optimism of the Federal era in Duxbury," Pillsbury said.

In those days, the street in front of the King Caesar House was lined with many picturesque homes that were owned by the ships' captains working for the Westons. The flourishing shipping industry created by the Westons also brought other craftsmen into town.

During the War of 1812, the younger Weston had 28 ships in the bay area off Powder Point.

A Weston-built ship carried the first American flag to the Black Sea in 1830. In 1841, the Westons' company built the *Hope*, New England's largest merchant ship.

But the shipbuilding industry started by the Westons eventually died because Duxbury Harbor was too shallow to accommodate the larger clipper ships that were being built. The business folded in 1854.

The last Weston to own the King Caesar House was Alden Weston, who sold it in 1886 to Frederick B. Knapp. For many years, Knapp ran the Powder Point School for Boys, which was adjacent to the mansion.

In 1937, Dr. Herman C. Bumpus bought the house. In 1945 it was sold to an architect, Emil Weber-Fulop, and his wife, a well-known Viennese artist.

A team of experts from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts helped to restore the wallpaper in the two front parlors. The wallpaper was made in 20½ by 17 inch hand-blocked sheets.

The East parlor wallpaper offers a colorful depiction of Spaniard Francisco Pizarro's 16th century conquest of the Incas in Peru. It was printed in 1826 by Amable LeRoy, son-in-law and successor to Joseph Defour, a famous French designer.

The front rooms, both upstairs and downstairs, remain practically unchanged from when the house was built.

The house will be open for the season beginning June 20. It will be open through Labor Day from 1 to 4 p.m. every day except Mondays. Tickets are \$3 for adults, \$1 for students and 50 cents for children. Groups should call 934-6106.